

Testimony of
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Before the
Pennsylvania State Senate
Transportation Committee

“Rural Crossroads of Economy and Infrastructure”

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Good afternoon, Chair Ward, Minority Chair Flynn, and Members of the Committee. I am Margaret Clark, Amtrak's Government Affairs Manager Northeast. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about Amtrak's importance to Pennsylvania's rural communities.

The Committee's choice of Altoona and the Railroaders' Memorial Museum for this hearing could not be more appropriate. Altoona owes its origin to the Pennsylvania Railroad's once four-track Main Line from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. The GG1 electric locomotives that powered the fastest trains between New York City and Washington from 1935 until they were retired by Amtrak in 1980 were built right here at the Altoona Works where the museum is located.

But the relationship between Altoona and railroads is not just about the past. Altoona is the home of Norfolk Southern's Juniata Locomotive Shop. Penn State Altoona is the only U.S. college or university with an undergraduate degree program in Rail Transportation Engineering. Amtrak recruits students from that program, and current and retired Amtrak employees serve on its Industry Advisory Board. Finally, Amtrak's service, on which my testimony will focus, plays a vital role in meeting the transportation needs and supporting the economies of Altoona and other communities in Pennsylvania's rural areas.

ABOUT AMTRAK

Amtrak, which began operation on May 1, 1971, is a federally chartered corporation created by Congress to relieve private railroads of their obligation to provide intercity passenger rail service. Amtrak is operated and managed as a private, for-profit company, with the federal government as controlling shareholder. Congress confirms most of Amtrak's board, provides critical annual funding and sets Amtrak's mission, which is to "Provide efficient and effective intercity passenger rail mobility consisting of high quality service that is trip-time competitive with other intercity travel options."¹

Amtrak operates approximately 300 daily trains on our 21,400 mile route network serving more than 500 cities and towns in 46 states, the District of Columbia and Canada. During Fiscal Year 2024, Amtrak carried 32.8 million passengers, our highest ridership ever and a nearly 15% increase over 2023. In the first half of Fiscal Year 2025, Amtrak's ridership was up more than 6% compared to the same period last year.

AMTRAK AND PENNSYLVANIA

Amtrak serves Pennsylvania with approximately 100 daily trains on which 6.8 million passengers boarded or alighted at Pennsylvania stations last year. For Amtrak,

¹ 49 U.S. Code §24101

Pennsylvania is a microcosm that illustrates the importance of our service and investments in providing mobility and enhancing local economies.

- Trains operating over Amtrak's Boston-to-Washington Northeast Corridor, including the high-speed *Acelas* that will travel up to 160 miles per hour when new trainsets enter service this year, serve William H. Gray III Philadelphia 30th Street Station in Philadelphia.
- Seven of Amtrak's 15 long-distance routes – routes of more than 750 miles that link large cities with smaller communities – serve Pennsylvania. Five of them serve Gray 30th Street Station; the others are the *Lake Shore Limited* from New York City and Boston to Chicago, which serves Erie, and the Washington to Chicago *Capitol Limited*, temporarily replaced since last November by the Miami-Washington-Chicago *Floridian*, which stops in Connellsville and Pittsburgh.
- Amtrak partners with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, or PennDOT, in the operation of two state-supported routes: the New York City-Philadelphia-Harrisburg *Keystone Service*, which operates over the Amtrak-owned Keystone Corridor between Philadelphia and Harrisburg, and the *Pennsylvanian*, which travels once a day in each direction between New York City and Pittsburgh via Philadelphia and Harrisburg. State-supported routes are Amtrak routes of 750 miles or less that are funded primarily by Amtrak's 21 state partners.

In addition to its current routes, Amtrak is supporting efforts by the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Rail Authority to establish a new service between New York City and Scranton and by the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority for a new route between Philadelphia and Reading. Both of those routes, as well as the *Keystone Service* and *Pennsylvanian* routes, have received funding for corridor development efforts under the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program. Amtrak is also supporting PennDOT's initiative to add a second daily round trip on the *Pennsylvanian* route.

Of Amtrak's 22,000 employees, 3,305 worked in Pennsylvania as of September 30, 2024. Their base wages and salaries during Fiscal Year 2024 totaled over \$309 million. Many of Amtrak's corporate offices and our national call center are located in Philadelphia.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, or IIJA, provided five years of advance appropriations for capital investments to Amtrak and for competitive rail grant programs. This funding, the first multi-year funding Congress has appropriated for Amtrak and rail, has allowed Amtrak and its state partners to finally advance long overdue capital investments in infrastructure, equipment and accessibility throughout the country. Information about these investments can be found at [AmtrakNewEra.com](https://www.amtraknewera.com).

Among the major investments Amtrak is undertaking are several projects in Pennsylvania.

- Last year, construction commenced on the redevelopment of Gray 30th Street Station and the surrounding district, a project undertaken through a public-private partnership between Amtrak and a master developer.
- Construction also began last year on a \$462 million project to build a new heavy equipment maintenance facility at Amtrak's Penn Coach Yard adjacent to Gray 30th Street Station.
- Amtrak completed last year a \$122 million track renewal project along the portion of the Keystone Corridor between Lancaster and Harrisburg that passes through many rural communities.
- Amtrak was recently awarded a \$397.3 million Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail grant funded by the IIJA for replacement of the century-old catenary infrastructure that provides power to Amtrak's and SEPTA's electrified trains along the Keystone Corridor between Philadelphia and Paoli.

Thanks largely to IIJA-funded projects, last year Amtrak spent \$4.5 billion on capital investments nationwide and purchased \$516 million in goods and services from vendors in Pennsylvania. Because Amtrak is subject to "Buy America" laws, 99% of our expenditures go to domestic suppliers, including many small businesses. As Amtrak continues to make major investments, we welcome the opportunity to add new Pennsylvania companies to those with whom we already do business. Information about becoming an Amtrak supplier can be found at Procurement.Portal.Amtrak.com.

AMTRAK AND PENNSYLVANIA'S RURAL COMMUNITIES

Amtrak plays a very important role in serving Pennsylvania's rural areas, particularly along the portion of the *Pennsylvanian's* route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. The *Floridian's* station in Connellsville and Amtrak's stations on the western portion of the Keystone Corridor also serve many passengers traveling from rural communities, particularly in the area around Lancaster where there are many people who do not drive for religious reasons.

Amtrak has operated the *Pennsylvanian* since 1980. As it passes through the largely rural region between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, it makes seven stops: Altoona, Greensburg, Huntingdon, Johnstown, Latrobe, Lewistown and Tyrone. What is particularly remarkable is that five of the Pennsylvania Railroad's station buildings in these communities, constructed between 1849 and 1916, have been preserved, a reflection of the importance the railroad had historically and continues to hold for local residents. From Pittsburgh, where the *Pennsylvanian* connects to the *Floridian*, and in Philadelphia, passengers traveling on the *Pennsylvanian* route can connect to trains serving destinations throughout Amtrak's network.

During Fiscal Year 2024, over 75,000 passengers alighted from or boarded the *Pennsylvanian* at its seven intermediate stops between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, a 16%

increase from 2023. An additional 3,785 passengers rode the *Capitol Limited* to or from Connellsville.

Amtrak's service to rural communities, and the connections it provides to educational institutions, health care facilities and for trips to visit family members and friends, have become increasingly important as many towns and small cities have lost most or all service from other intercity passenger transportation modes. When Amtrak began operating the *Pennsylvanian* in 1980, Altoona-Blair County Airport had 18 scheduled flights a day to and from cities along the *Pennsylvanian's* route. Today it has just three daily flights, all of which serve only Charlotte, North Carolina. In 2022, Greyhound reduced its service to Altoona and other western Pennsylvania communities on the *Pennsylvanian* route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh to a single daily round trip.

Thanks to the advance appropriations provided by the IIJA, Amtrak is making significant investments in stations throughout our network, including those that serve rural Pennsylvania, to bring them into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA. Our goal is to complete work to achieve ADA compliance, on which we have spent nearly a billion dollars since 2011, at all stations for which we have ADA responsibility by 2029.

Construction of new ADA-compliant platforms and pedestrian and other improvements is already underway at the Lancaster station. Over the next few years,

we expect to spend \$32 million for ADA work at the seven intermediate stations along the *Pennsylvanian* route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. We plan to begin construction of platform, lighting and accessibility improvements in the shelter and parking lot at the Latrobe station later this year, and of platform, lighting, stair and elevator enclosure improvements at Greensburg next year.

The investments we are making in these stations will improve the travel experience of the disability community and all passengers who use them. Amtrak's ADA improvements also benefit local economies: much of the work is performed by local construction companies that purchase materials and supplies in, and hire subcontractors from, the surrounding area.

Amtrak's Keystone Corridor plays an important role in freight rail service to rural Pennsylvania communities. Norfolk Southern, which provides freight service over the Keystone Corridor, and four short line railroads that connect to it, serve many agricultural shippers and industries in small towns in southeastern Pennsylvania for which the Keystone Corridor provides access to the national freight rail network.

Two years ago, Amtrak worked with the Strasburg Rail Road, a locally owned railroad, to support construction of a new freight yard next to the Keystone Corridor near Lancaster. The new yard will facilitate expansion of the Strasburg's freight business,

giving farmers and local companies a lower cost transportation option and taking trucks off of rural roads.

CHALLENGES – AND OPPORTUNITIES

Amtrak's trains also play an important role in helping rural communities meet the challenges of small, and in many cases declining and aging, populations. Our trains can also contribute to rural communities' efforts to diversify their economies by attracting new industries, tourism and college students.

The *Pennsylvanian* connects small and mid-sized western Pennsylvania communities to the state's four largest metropolitan areas: Philadelphia, Lancaster, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. Those metropolitan areas have a combined population of 9.8 million, 75% of Pennsylvania's population. That's a huge market for what communities along the *Pennsylvanian* route have to offer: the unique railway engineering program at Penn State Altoona; other educational institutions such as Juniata College in Huntingdon and the University of Pittsburgh campuses in Greensburg and Johnstown; and tourist attractions like the world famous Horseshoe Curve and the museums in Johnstown, Altoona and Huntingdon, to name just a few.

Smaller communities need good public transportation to and from major cities in order to attract college students from outside their immediate area, visitors who don't have

cars or don't want to drive long distances, and businesses whose employees must travel frequently. That's where Amtrak comes in.

The rise in remote working since the COVID-19 pandemic creates another opportunity for rural communities that Amtrak can foster. Many workers who now need to go into the office only once a week, or in some cases just one week a month, are choosing to live in smaller communities distant from their workplaces that offer more affordable housing, access to outdoor recreation, and an alternative to a big city lifestyle. A recent Stanford University study found that the number of "Super Commuters" – workers who commute 75 or more miles to work, in most cases not every day – has increased 32% since 2019 in the ten largest U.S. cities.² When those workers do need to be in the office, commuting by train allows them to work productively throughout their trip.

As for Amtrak, the biggest challenge we face in maintaining and improving service to rural communities is funding. Unlike other transportation modes, intercity passenger rail does not receive substantial, predictable, multi-year federal funding from a trust fund or other source. Until the enactment of the IIJA, Amtrak was almost entirely reliant upon annual federal appropriations, the amount of which is usually not known until months into the fiscal year, to fund capital investments and operating costs not covered

² Bloom, Nick and Finan, Alex, *The Rise in Super Commuters*, June 2024
(https://nbloom.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj24291/files/media/file/supercommuters_final.pdf).

by fares or state payments, including Amtrak's share of the operating costs of state-supported routes like the *Pennsylvanian* and *Keystone Service*. The IIJA's advance appropriations have provided substantial multi-year funding for passenger and freight rail for the first time since Amtrak's creation. However, that funding is only authorized and to be provided through September 30, 2026.

Another challenge is that, outside of the Northeast Corridor, the Keystone Corridor and a couple of other routes, Amtrak does not own the rail lines over which its trains operate. Most of Amtrak's network is owned and primarily used by private freight railroads, which control dispatching and often seek large capital investments when Amtrak and its state partners propose adding new or additional services.

While demand for Amtrak's services has been growing rapidly, our equipment fleet has been shrinking – and aging. We carried more passengers in 2024 than we did in pre-pandemic 2019 with fewer passenger cars than we had then. Like most of Amtrak's northeastern trains, the *Pennsylvanian* and *Keystone Service* use Amfleet cars built nearly a half century ago.

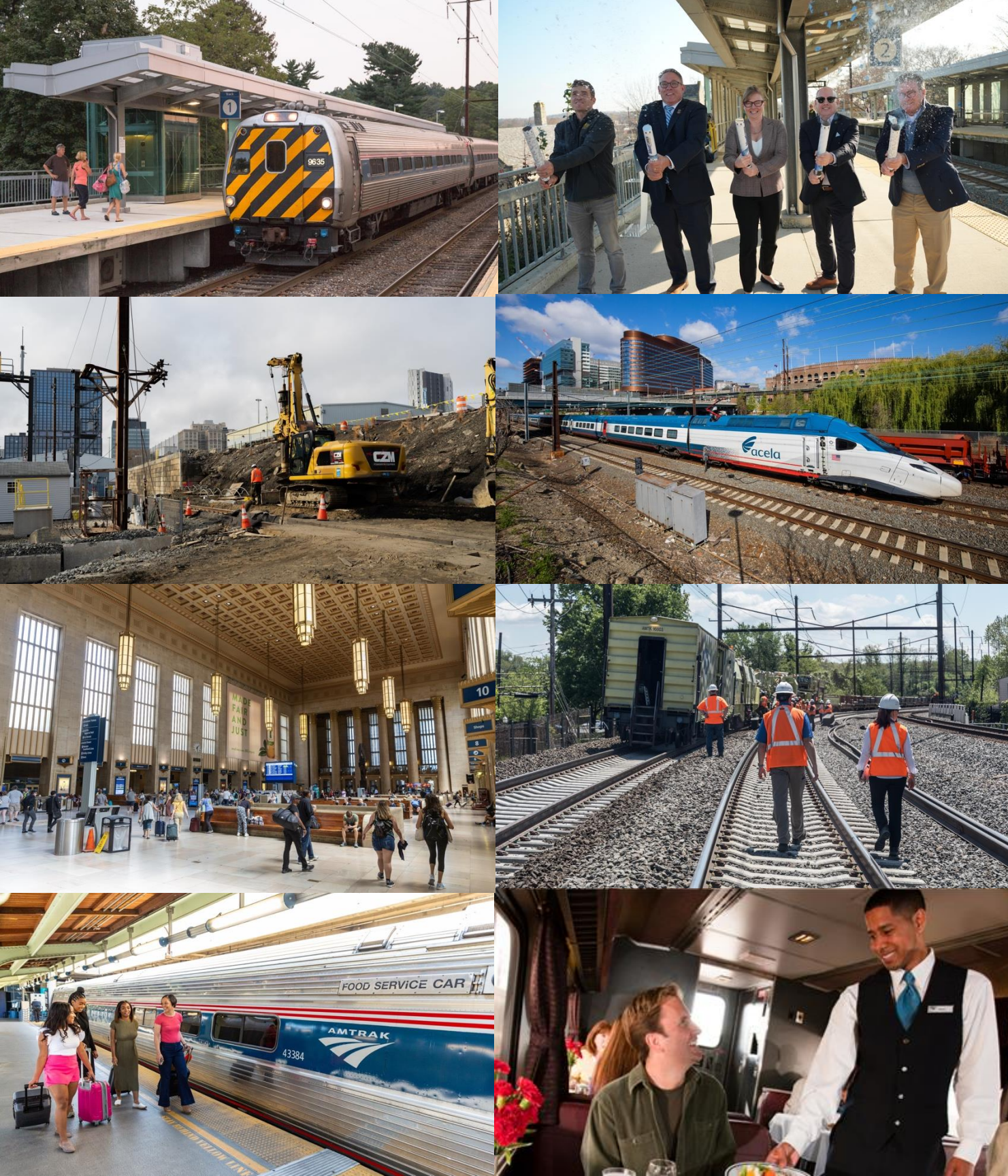
Thanks to the funding provided by IIJA and the support of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, actions to address two of the challenges Amtrak trains serving rural Pennsylvania face – aged equipment and *Pennsylvanian* service operating just once a day – are well underway. Amtrak is using IIJA funding to purchase new dual mode *Amtrak*

Airo trainsets capable of operating under both electric and diesel power for most of our northeastern routes, including the *Pennsylvanian* and the *Keystone Service*. When those trainsets enter service on northeastern routes between 2027 and 2030, Amtrak's passengers in Pennsylvania will enjoy modern equipment with improved amenities, and the *Pennsylvanian's* time-consuming switch between diesel and electric locomotives in Philadelphia will no longer be necessary.

There is also good news regarding the biggest impediment – service frequency – to travel on the *Pennsylvanian*. Pennsylvania and Norfolk Southern have reached agreement on over \$200 million in investments between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, funded by Pennsylvania and a \$143.6 million Federal-State-Partnership grant it has secured, that will allow for the operation of a second *Pennsylvanian* round-trip that is expected to begin next year.

Fittingly, one of the planned investments to facilitate initiation of the second *Pennsylvanian* is the reinstallation of the third track, removed many years ago, along the former Pennsylvania Railroad Main Line between Altoona and Tyrone. There is no better illustration that railroads are not just rural Pennsylvania's past – they are also an important, and growing, part of its future.

I thank you for your time today and look forward to answering any questions you may have.



Amtrak in Pennsylvania: Connecting Rural Communities

Pennsylvania Senate Transportation
Committee
Altoona, PA

May 28, 2025

Margaret Clark – Government Affairs

Amtrak's History and Mission

- Congress relieved the railroads of their legal obligation to serve intercity passengers, instead assigning that responsibility to a new federally-chartered corporation called Amtrak.
- Amtrak is operated and managed as a private, for-profit company—with the federal government as controlling shareholder. Congress sets the company's mission, confirms most of the board, and provides critical annual funding.
- Operations began May 1, 1971.



Amtrak's Statutory Mission: *"Provide efficient and effective intercity passenger rail mobility consisting of high quality service that is trip-time competitive with other intercity travel options." (49 U.S. Code §24101)*

Quick Facts

More than 40 routes (NEC, state-supported, and long-distance)

21,400 route-miles

300 weekday trains

500+ stations in 46 states, plus D.C. & Canada

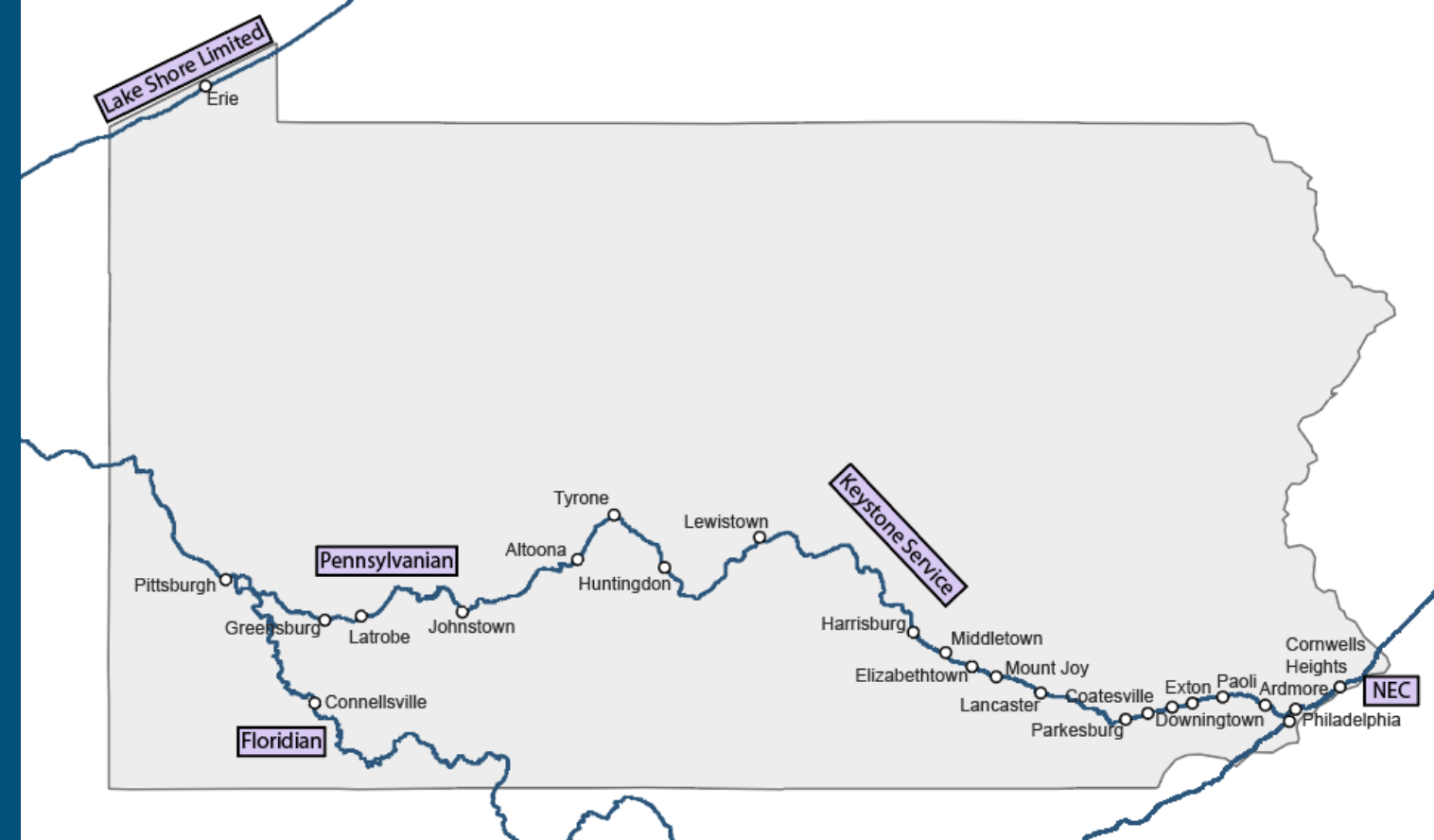
Record Ridership: 32.8M in FY24

More demand for service than seats available!



Amtrak in Pennsylvania:

- 100 trains daily
- 6.8 million passengers boarding or deboarding annually
- Services include high-speed Acela, Northeast Regional, seven long-distance routes, and two state-supported routes
- 3,305 PA employees





Amtrak Supporting Rural Communities



Critical Service

As intercity bus and air service declines, Amtrak remains vital for rural mobility.



Access to Major Metros

Amtrak connects smaller towns to jobs and healthcare facilities in PA's major metropolitan areas.



Local Partnerships

We work with local railroads like Strasburg Rail Road to support rural freight service.



University Connections

We connect students to schools, including Penn State Altoona, Juniata College, University of Pittsburgh campuses.

Amtrak Investments in PA and the National Supply Chain

\$516M

Annual Spending in PA

Purchases from PA vendors in FY 2024.

99%

Domestic Suppliers

Nearly all expenditures go to American companies under "Buy America" laws.

\$4.5B

Nationwide Capital Investment

in FY 2024, largely from IIJA-funded projects.

Amtrak's investments are creating jobs and benefiting local, state and national supply chains.





Amtrak Projects in Pennsylvania

\$462 Million Penn Coach Yard Maintenance Facility

Construction began last year on a new heavy equipment facility to service new *Airo* and *NextGen Acela* trainsets in Philadelphia.

\$122 Million Track Renewal

Completed track renewal along the Keystone Corridor between Lancaster and Harrisburg.

\$397.3 Million Catenary Replacement

Modernizing century-old power infrastructure between Philadelphia and Paoli.

\$55 Million ADA Improvements

Upgrading seven stations along the Pennsylvanian route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh with new platforms and elevators.

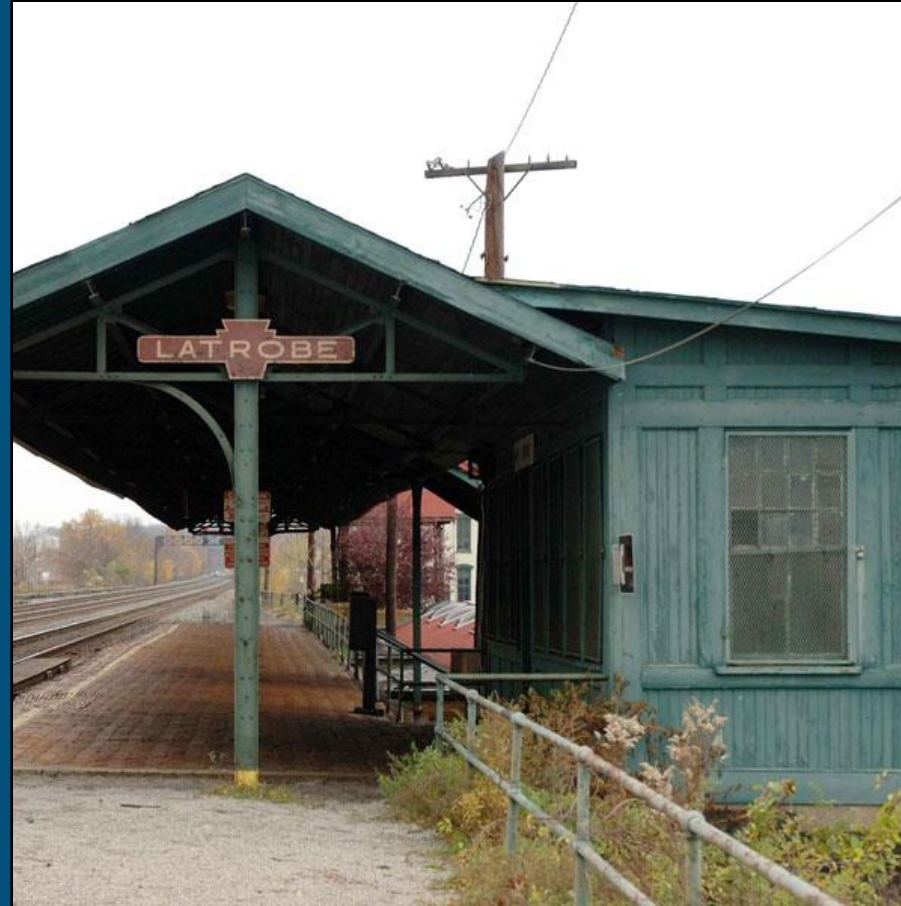
Pennsylvania Station Upgrade Projects



Lancaster

Under construction

Platform, pedestrian improvements



Latrobe

Construction begins in FY25

Platform, lighting, accessibility improvements in shelter and parking lot



Greensburg

Construction begins in FY26

Platform, lighting, stair and elevator enclosures



Upgrades to the Pennsylvanian



New Amtrak Airo Trainsets

Modern dual-mode equipment entering service between 2027-2030.



No Locomotive Switch

Eliminating time-consuming engine changes in Philadelphia.



Second Daily Roundtrip

\$200M state and federal investments in Norfolk Southern tracks enable additional service next year.



Third Track Restoration

Investments include reinstalling track through Altoona to support expanded service.



Amtrak is Delivering a New Era of Rail for Pennsylvania

Visit AmtrakNewEra.com
to stay up to date!

